

CLAIMS

1. A method for controlling access by a first computer to an on-line
5 user group hosted by a second computer, wherein the first computer stores
personal data of a user, comprising:

providing (18) from said second computer to said first computer a
privacy policy identifying the personal data required to be provided to permit
access to said user group;

10 at said first computer determining (22) whether a received privacy policy
is acceptable; and

if acceptable, at the first computer selecting (30) from store the personal
data identified in the privacy policy and transmitting (28) the same to the
second computer.

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2. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the first computer
presents a received privacy policy to a user, and acceptance or otherwise of
said policy is determined by user input (24).

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3. A method as claimed in Claim 2, wherein the first computer
formats the received privacy policy prior to presentation to the user.

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4. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the first computer
stores privacy policy preference data for a user and, based (26) on the same,
determines (30) automatically whether a received privacy policy is acceptable.

5. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the step (22) of
determining acceptance includes a process of negotiation (38) between the
first computer user and the user group host.

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6. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein a received privacy
policy may be partly accepted (22.B), with only a part (30.B) of the requested

personal data being transmitted (28) as a result, and only limited access being granted to the on-line user group.

7. Computer apparatus configured for accessing an on-line user
5 group hosted by a second computer and comprising:

storage means (54, 56, 68) for personal data of a user of the apparatus;
communications means (58) operable to exchange data with the second
computer over a data link (60) and receive from said second computer a
privacy policy identifying the personal data required to be provided to permit
10 access to said user group;

programmable processor means (50) configured to determine whether a
received privacy policy is acceptable and, if so, to select from said storage
means (54, 56, 68) the personal data identified in the privacy policy and, via
the communications means (58), transmit the same to the second computer.

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8. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 7, further comprising an output
device (64) wherein the processor means (50) presents a received privacy
policy to a user, and user input means (62) by operation of which a user
determines acceptance or otherwise of said policy.

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9. A method as claimed in Claim 8, wherein the processor means
(50) is arranged to format the received privacy policy prior to presentation by
the output device (64).

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10. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 7, wherein the storage means
(54, 56, 68) holds privacy policy preference data for a user and, based on the
same, the processor means (50) determines automatically whether a received
privacy policy is acceptable.

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11. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 7, wherein the processor means
(50) is further operable to determine partial acceptance of a received privacy

policy, and to select from said storage means (54, 56, 68) only a part of the requested usage data.

12. A software utility operable to configure a programmable device to
5 perform the functions of the first computer in a method as claimed in Claim 1.

13. A storage device (68) holding a software utility as claimed in
Claim 12.